

I. The Jews in French History up to the Revolution of 1789.

At the time of the first Crusades, when the masses of the French people were on the move, the first energetic defensive measures were taken against the Jews in France. Through their position as tax collectors and tenants, but especially as moneylenders, they had exploited the people and taken most of the food trade into their hands. The clerical leaders of the crusading movement were at one with the people in their hatred of Judaism. Peter of Amiens and especially Peter of Cluny represented their views to the King of France. Peter of Cluny wrote:

"God does not want them to be exterminated; rather, like the fratricide Cain, they shall continue to exist to great torment and great ignominy, so that life may be more bitter to them than death. They are dependent, miserable, oppressed, fearful, and must remain so until they have turned to the way of salvation."

When, after the Crusades, the bloody defenses of the people died down, the hostility to the Jews did not disappear with it. Judaism had long forgotten the rejections and continued its old usurious trade. From letters of Pope Innocent III to King Philip Augustus it is known that the Jews themselves owned church property as a pledge or lease. In a series of regional councils, the clergy, together with the princes, decided to take strong measures against the excessive activities of the Jews. The annual interest rate was fixed at 43 0/0 and all commercial contracts and promissory notes had to be submitted to a clerk for certification. The wealth of the relatively small number of Jews in France at that time is shown by the fact that in 1217 alone the Jews paid 7550 livres for stamp duties.

However, it did not remain only with the merchant and economic restriction. Rather, Jewish writings, which were considered sources of Jewish essence, were also destroyed. In Paris alone, in one month of 1242, a total of 24 carts of Talmud books were publicly burned.

All these measures were to no avail, however, so that Philip IV decided to put an end to Jewish activity by expelling the Jews from France.

Empire. A number of counties in France joined in this measure, but already a decade later the Jews were the most widespread in the country and kings and princes tried to control them by means of treaties. When this attempt also failed, Charles VI issued a decree in 1394 ordering the expulsion of all Jews from the Kingdom of France. A large part of the Jewry turned to southern France, where it settled in the commercial centers of Marseilles, Bordeaux and Montpellier, and resumed the old trade relations with the Near East. Their immense wealth, their powerful trade relations consolidated their position to such an extent that they were able to hold their own in spite of all measures. Naturally, they eagerly sought the readmission of their race comrades in the kingdom of France, offering the king a sum of 100,000 livres for this purpose. This was the money that 350 families in southern France wanted to raise, which speaks for the great wealth of the Jews living there.

Despite all efforts, however, the decree of Charles VI, which was further extended by Charles VIII, remained in force until 1776, so that France was without Jews for almost 400 years. It was not until the reign of Louis XVI that one of the Jews of southern France, Rodrigues Pereira, succeeded, through

money and influence, in persuading the king to repeal the expulsion decrees.

II The French Revolution and Napoleon's Jewish Laws I.

At the outbreak of the French Revolution, two-thirds of all French Jewry inhabited Alsace-Lorraine. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was from there that the Jewish question was raised in the Revolution.

When in the spring of 1788 the States General met in Paris to form what was later to become the National Assembly, Cerf Berr prevailed upon Necker to allow the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine to elect a deputation to present their wishes to the Assembly. They did not have in mind to ask for freedom or even for French citizenship. Rather, a powerful popular indignation in Alsace was the deeper cause.

Their methods of exploitation had reached their peak there. They owned mortgages for 12 million. Thus, almost the entire peasantry was in their hands and with it the entire grain and livestock trade. Then the people began to resist the usury by force. Cerf Berr, however, appeared before the National Assembly with tears in his eyes.

"May the people recognize in us their brothers. May the divine love of neighbor, so dear to you, extend to us! Let there be a radical reform of all those shameful institutions by which we are gagged, and may this reform, for which we have hitherto labored in vain and for which we now tearfully implore you, may it be the work of your charity, the work of your hands!" (D, page 90/1.

If the assembly was moved by these words, it did not quite know how to solve the problems. The Jews, among whom "the thought began to stir that the rising wave of freedom would also be able to carry them up out of the abyss of lawlessness," did not yet dare to express it. They found two energetic intercessors in Abbé Grégoire, who exclaimed pathetically, "50 O000 Frenchmen have awakened today as slaves; it depends on your good will that they will return to rest as free citizens!" (2) (page 91) and in Mirabeau.

Grégoire and Mirabeau, as the most influential personalities, raised their pro-Jewish voices in the National Assembly. Their impact is

become decisive for the entire development of the Jewish question in the French Revolution. Although the Declaration of the Rights of Man had at least recognized the Jews as human beings, the two defenders of the oppressed race had set themselves the task of regarding them as citizens, as fellow citizens. Therein lies their great significance for French Jewry, for as the Jewish historian Dubnow writes:

"The publication of the Rights of Man and the first pro-Jewish words dropped in the National Assembly caused a joyful excitement among the leading men of French Jewry. Now they no longer needed to impose restraint on themselves for the policy of influencing Parliament from without, by petitions and deputations, which had been contemplated earlier." (1) Page 87,9.

However, the development of the two Frenchmen must be noted in order to put their Jew-friendliness in perspective. Mirabeau, who was mostly in debt, had come to know and appreciate the power of the banks and stock exchanges both in Paris and in Berlin. During his stay in Berlin he frequented the well-known Jewish salons of Hertz et al. And was made familiar with the thoughts of the universally revered Mendelssohn and thus trained for the emancipation of the Jews. So much so that even in a conversation with Frederick the Great the Jews were the object of interest. He could not ignore the excessive usury in Alsace-Lorraine, but he had the explanation for it at hand. In his opinion, only the withholding of the human and civil rights of the Jews for centuries caused the depravity of the Jews. Influenced by the prevailing idea of planned education, he proposed a civic education and abolition of their religious restrictions.

Mirabeau's first advocacy of the Jews occurs with the translation of the writing of Mendelssohn's student Isai Berr-Bing. This Jewish backer, through another Mendelssohn student, provided material to Abbé Gregoire for his writing, "Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des juifs." Grégoire, too, was concerned with the regeneration of the Jews. He, too, had quite correctly recognized it.

"We have seen with what rapidity they multiply and how they make the peasants everywhere liable to pay interest; the products of first necessity come first of all into their hands and their people will continue to spread their branches. It is consequently the parasitic plants which gnaw the marrow of the tree to which they attach themselves, and which may eventually suck it dry and destroy it." (2) Page 11.

Yes, Mirabeau even saw racialism in Judaism, as evidenced by his words, "la race d'Abraham subiste sans melange." Nevertheless, he demanded civil rights for the Jews so that they could be absorbed into the French nation. To achieve this goal, however, they had to give up their Yiddish, even in the synagogues. Thus Mirabeau saw the way open to the Frenchification of the Jews and says with conviction:

"What influence will this regenerated people have on French commerce? None, or almost none." (1) Page 107.

In this boundless optimism he dismissed all objections by saying:

"All these objections fall when experience speaks."

In the rising propaganda for the liberation of the Jews through pamphlets and the press, one wisely avoided any reference to a Jewish nation or a Jewish people. The demands of humanity, religious equality with the other denominations were supposed to give the Jews civil rights. In endless debates the National Assembly dealt with the question without coming to a conclusion. In order to finally achieve this, the Jews in the South, as the more visible ones, insisting on their old rights and good patriotism, sent a petition to the Assembly demanding their civil rights. Once the beginning was made, the Jews in the West could also get their rights. In fact, the attempt succeeded. On January 28, 1790, the southern center was granted civil rights.

After this first redoubt was taken, the attack on the second one took place immediately. The Jewish

colony in Paris participates vigorously in the riots to show their patriotism to the assembly, so that a Parisian city council member can state: "Without waiting until they have become fellow citizens, the population already treats the Jews as brothers." (1) Page 107.

No wonder, the connection of the Jews to the rabble of the street will not have been too difficult. However, the Paris city council became an influential instrument in the struggle in the National Assembly, as the situation became more and more acute. The rural population had become aware of the goings-on of the Jews in Paris and began to grow restless. That's when the Parisian municipality made a new push on the National Assembly, which finally led to the desired result. On September 28, the decree was issued according to which, by taking the constitutional and civic oath, the Jews were granted civil rights.

"The day has finally come when we see the curtain torn that separated us from our fellow citizens and brothers. At last

we have regained the rights that were snatched from us more than eighteen centuries ago."

When the Jews were granted full equality with other Frenchmen by the French Revolution, their habitual profiteering took on an ever-increasing scale. As consul, Napoleon already became aware of this activity of the Jews when the complaints of the exploited population in Alsace-Lorraine increased more and more. In 1806, he therefore commissioned a committee to investigate the question of the extent to which Jews could be absorbed into the French people. In the same year, he put the Jewish question on the agenda of the Council of State. In contrast to his partly Jew-friendly environment, Napoleon outlined the nature of Jewry with clear insights.

"The government," said the Emperor, "cannot stand by indifferently while a degenerate nation, deeply sunk and capable of every vulgarity, takes control of two departments of old Alsace. The Jews are to be regarded as a nation and not as a sect: they are a nation within the nation."

The first result of the discussions in the Council of State was a decree suspending for the course of a year the executions of the court sentences obtained by Jewish money usurers. At the same time, it was ordered that Jewry should elect an assembly to examine the internal issues of the Jewish faith, so that the "civic morality that had faltered among a very considerable part of the Jews" would be restored. A number of questions were submitted to the Jewish Parliament concerning the coexistence between Jews and Frenchmen. To authorize the decisions of the Jewish Parliament, Napoleon ordered the convening of a Jewish Synod. This synhedrion constituted a high assembly of distinguished Jews that had not met for centuries. However, all the declarations of devotion on the part of the assembled Jews could not dissuade Napoleon from his conviction. In 1807 he extended the decree issued the year before by another year. In the following year, a new decree was issued, which was to settle the Jewish question in France once and for all. This decree of March 17, 1808, ordered a series of measures so drastic that Judaism called it a "décret infâme" (shameful decree). It ordered the establishment of a consistorial constitution of the Jews. To carry out this measure, a central consistory was formed in Paris, to which the district consistories in the individual departments were subordinate. In this way, the self-government of the Jewish communities was abolished and placed under the control of the central consistory, which in turn was supervised by the police authorities. This measure was limited primarily to

the uniform registration of Jewry in the country.

Far more effective and significant, however, were the decrees eliminating Jewry from economic life. The decree decreed the invalidity of all bonds given to Jews without the permission of the authorities. The same applied to all bills of exchange if the Jew had not paid the full amount of the bill. Exploitative credit transactions were made harmless by fixing an interest rate of 10 per cent. In addition, all Jewish commerce was placed under state control. The Jew was ordered to obtain a special patent from the prefect of a department if he wished to trade in that district. For approval, he needed a certificate of character from the magistrate and the Jewish consistory.

Jewish immigration to Alsace-Lorraine was also prevented by the decree. After the expiration of 10 years, it was to be seen whether it would be possible to repeal this decree.

These effective measures, intended for the future, were not to remain in force for too long. After the fall of Napoleon, Jewish influence increased again to such an extent that this decree was repealed at the end of the 10 years.

III Jewry takes possession of France.

Despite Napoleon's clear opposition, Jewry began to establish itself in France under his government. During the Continental Blockade, the Rothschilds laid the foundation of their later fortune through the flourishing smuggling of cloth from England. But when Napoleon put their business in Frankfurt under control, they went to France, where they found a brilliant profit. Wellington's troops were cut off from any support from England by the blockade. The notes Wellington issued were deeply priced in Spain, while in England they brought in their face value. So Charles Rothschild began to buy up the notes on the Pyrenean coast and traded them to his brother Nathan for gold. Nathan then traveled through France, where his brother James was waiting for him at the Channel, to again exchange the paper money for gold. In London, James redeemed the notes at a corresponding profit. When James could not supply enough gold, Nathan began buying it up in France, and from that time on he familiarized himself with French conditions. The consequences of this equally dangerous and profitable activity were felt by Napoleon when, after his defeat in Russia, Wellington's well-equipped troops marched into southern France.

England, however, knew how to express its gratitude to the Rothschilds. When after Waterloo the penniless Louis XVIII entered Paris, it was Nathan Rothschild who financed his court. The associated calculation, now with royal help also his entry into France, was destroyed by the return of Napoleon. After all, his influence was already so consolidated after the second Waterloo that the Rothschilds took over France's reparation payments to the Allies.

The highly treacherous activities at the time of the blockade had not yet been forgotten, however, so that at the time of the second French state loan of Charles X. Nathan, who in the meantime had established his banking house in Paris, was passed over. This was to take its revenge. He bought up all

available share certificates, which caused their price to rise. But when Nathan was again ignored for the next government bond issue, which promised success because of the good status of the first one, he threw all the bonds of the first one on the market at one stroke, which caused a catastrophic fall and made the second bond issue impossible. When issuing the next bond, the state attached importance to the participation of Nathan Rothschild. He was finally in the saddle.

The government's attitude toward the Jews as a whole underwent a similar transformation. A decree of 1814 determined that all citizens enjoyed equal freedom of religious confession. The clergy of the Catholic as well as the other Christian churches were to be paid by the state. The rabbis were thus excluded. This apparently unambiguous position changed when it came to the repeal of the "décret infâme", which expired in 1818. Without much discussion, it was declared repealed and the Alsatian peasants were once again exposed to usury.

The second state loan, for which Nathan Rothschild's funds were now also claimed, had almost ruined the latter. The daring speculations failed, the allied finance minister had to go, and so the outbreak of the July Revolution came just in time.

The liberal Louis Philipp was doubly devoted to the Rothschilds. On the one hand, the Rothschild influence on Metternich had helped him to his throne, on the other hand, he had his not insignificant bank speculations carried out by the Rothschilds. James Rothschild, who had taken up his position after Nathan's death, was a friend of the liberal citizen-king, who soon handed him the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor and thus gave him the necessary prestige in the eyes of the French.

"His German birth, his Jewish accent, his dark, doubtful beginnings, his earlier failures, all these were forgotten and forgiven, and he now soon achieved an influence on the government and a dominion over the national economy such as had never been possible for Nathan even in his best days."

(1) Page 254.

From now on, French government bonds and other major ventures are a matter for the House of Rothschild. In the forties, when a railroad was to be built between Paris and the industrial center in the north, the state entrusted James Rothschild with a large part of the contract. The House of Rothschild was to bear the costs in the approximate amount of 160 million. This sum must be paid back to him in 40 years. As compensation, Rothschild has the right of management and exploitation:

"The State will bear the cost of the road (about one hundred million); Mr. von Rothschild will advance the material (60 million), the value of which will be repaid to him after 40 years, estimated; and as interest on this advance, Mr. von Rothschild will collect 15 or 20 million a year during 40 years. Bravo!"

(2) Page 206.

But such a profitable contract had first to be fought for by the Rothschilds.

"With a suddenness that stunned all France, all at once the French advocates of state enterprises understood that they had been mistaken in their views. Ministers, deputies, and journalists agreed, in the

interests of economy, operational safety, and the public good, that the Northern Railway could be built and managed solely by the Rothschild Brothers banking firm." (1) Page 254.

What had happened? Rothschild had bribed everything that had name and rank. Perhaps this monstrous scandal would never have reached the public had not the French newspaper "National" broken the silence and revealed the cards. The Jewish power growing up as a competitor, the Pereiras from southern France, had succeeded in exposing the corrupt Rothschild system. According to the "National", shares for 71/2 million were distributed free of charge to deputies, ministers, and newspapers. However, the owners were not to enjoy them for long. Some clever stock exchange maneuvers of Rothschild were enough to let them all come back into his hands.

The construction of the Northern Railway was completed, James Rothschild was honored as a public benefactor, when the consequences of the Jewish business began to set in. Three weeks after the completion of the construction, the news arrived: 37 travelers killed by a railroad disaster. Now the long restrained hatred of the people against Rothschild made itself felt. The public benefactor was branded a fraud who "sacrificed human flesh to the interests of the golden calf." (1)

Cartoons and pamphlets recalled the Rothschilds' earlier frauds. A. Toussenel wrote his sensational book, "Les Juifs. Rois de l'Epoque" (Paris 1845). France was in turmoil. James Rothschild was too surprised to fight back. He doubled contributions to public charity and threw out huge sums to help the poor. The banking enterprise was on the verge of collapse when, once again, the Revolution became the Rothschilds' savior.

The Republican government had appointed as Minister of Finance the Jew Goudchaux, who made sure that James Rothschild got away without much damage. The position of the house was shaken, however, and thus the way was cleared for another Jewish dynasty, which was able to exploit the scandal for itself: the Pereira brothers.

In addition to the Rothschilds, the July Revolution had also raised another Jew on the shield: Adolphe Isaac Crémieux. This Jewish advocate became the champion of Jewish interests not only in France but also in other states. Already at the time of taking the obligatory Jewish oath of the advocates, he refused to comply with the traditional

requirement, and a few years later he also succeeded in abolishing the oath more judaeorum. Standing on the side of the left-wing parties, he was elected vice-president of the Central Consistory of Jews in Paris. This gave him a position of influence that was soon to be felt by the French government. When once again the question of the state salary of the rabbis was discussed in the Chamber, he succeeded in pushing through the Jewish demand by

"like an invisible mainspring, exerting a gentle pressure" on the government and parliament. (3) Page 270.

What Rothschilds achieved with their money, Crémieux brought about with the pressure of the left-wing parties. Once successful, four years later he had another opportunity to unleash his power. In 1835, the Swiss government, in accordance with its Jewish legislation, had banned a Jew who had immigrated

from Alsace from settling and owning real estate. The case was highlighted by the Jewish "independent" press, forcing the government to deal with the disrespect of a "Frenchman." The result: severance of consular relations with the canton of Basel for "disrespect of international law". The left-wing republican Crémieux, however, placed himself at the head of the delegation, which expressed its gratitude to the king with the words:

"It happened in the 19th century: a French citizen was denied the right to acquire real estate in a canton of Switzerland, contrary to international law and the content of treaties. This citizen was a Jew, that was his only crime. But the Jew who was expelled from Switzerland said, "I am a French citizen!" - and the King of the French broke off all relations with the canton that had disregarded the rights associated with this citizen. Glory be to him who, by a solemn act, revealed to the world the great, imperishable achievements of our glorious Revolution." (3) Page 271.

After Crémieux had thus entered the soil of politics, he was soon elected to the Chamber of Deputies, where, under his influence, a series of laws were fought through which corresponded to the views of his followers. In this era, the oath of the Jews was abolished, the introduction of divorce was suggested, and the treatment of the Jews in Switzerland and Saxony was discussed anew. The opposition he faced increased the number of his radical followers, who knew only one goal with him: revolution.

"The conservative politics of Guizot drove Crémieux further and further to the left, into the jaws of that radical opposition which followed the rightward course taken before the

July monarchy's right-wing course and thus paved the way for the revolution of 1848." (3) Page 272.